



SUPPORTING ACTUARIAL SUCCESS

Employees are one of a company's greatest assets. Maintaining and developing the interest, focus, and skills of employees creates a talented workforce, benefiting both the company and the individuals. Actuaries are no exception. At John Hancock, recognition programs, professional development, networking sessions and a diverse range of traditional and non-traditional roles allow actuaries to acquire an arsenal of transferable skills. These development opportunities also allow John Hancock to foster a strong internal actuarial community with great depth and breadth of knowledge and skills across the entire company.

The standard across the insurance industry is to expose student actuaries to a variety of work and opportunities. It is easy for potential students to compare exam compensation, materials, study time and developmental opportunities across student programs of many companies. With this simple comparison, staying competitive in this area has not only become a priority across the industry but a requirement to recruit talented young employees.

Not as clear is how much companies work to develop actuaries when they become fellows. At John Hancock, actuaries are encouraged to move internally across positions, product lines and even international borders throughout their career. In an informal study of all 175 US-based actuaries at John Hancock, 110 are FSAs. Of this group, 31 were recently hired, 40 changed product lines and 20 changed roles within a product line over the past three years. This leaves 19, or only 11% of the John Hancock actuarial population without a role change in the past three years.

Sami Alajaji, AVP and Actuary, is an example of a John Hancock actuary who has benefited from the opportunities at the Company. Since beginning his career at John Hancock in 2005, he has worked in four very different roles: Reinsurance Pricing, Fixed Annuities Valuation, Life Insurance Product Development and Variable Annuities Modeling. In addition to switching product lines, Alajaji took on very different responsibilities with each product line. He believes rotations "provide actuaries the potential to get exposed to different facets of the actuarial practice and gain experience in multiple business units. In addition to the great amount of knowledge I gained from each rotation, the changes have kept the work interesting, challenging and fresh."

John Hancock managers and employees recognize the benefit of these internal movements. Alajaji comments, "Rotations are part of the John Hancock culture. The changes I went through were smoothly executed and got the full support of the managers in the different areas."

Another key component of developing actuaries at John Hancock is achieving success through professional excellence and providing opportunities outside daily responsibilities. Sinead O'Connor, AVP and Actuary and Alex Silva, ASA, were each given support to perform a research project sponsored by John Hancock's President, Jim Boyle. They were each paired with a senior executive mentor and invited to share their ideas and findings with Senior Management after the research was completed. Also to encourage development are quarterly internal networking sessions with Craig Raymond, John Hancock's Chief Actuary. The sessions include all John Hancock actuaries and allow time to host engaging presentations and for the actuarial community to step outside their daily responsibilities, come together as a cohesive group and share ideas and experiences with one another.

At John Hancock, developing actuaries and promoting their professional successes is a clear priority. Through a combination of internal movement, special projects and team building activities, the organization fosters a strong actuarial community within a strong company structure.

Contribution from Rachel Lee, Actuarial Assistant, Product Review & Risk Management, John Hancock



NOTES FROM MANAGEMENT



Actuary Connect interviewed Gus Williams, FIA. Gus currently is AVP, US Capital Management at John Hancock. Gus has been working in John Hancock's Capital and Risk Management Group since October 2010. Previously, he held a role with Manulife Reinsurance as a Marketing Actuary. His previous experience includes pricing, marketing and valuation roles for Revios and Swiss Re, both in London and Cologne, Germany. Gus has a BSc in Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics from Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland.

What motivated you to join Manulife, John Hancock's parent company, in 2006?

I was working for a life reinsurer and was over halfway through a two year secondment from London to the head office in Cologne. I was keen to extend my stay in Germany, so the opportunity to move to Manulife's Cologne office was ideal.

I was offered the role of Marketing Actuary at Manulife which would make me responsible for the pricing and marketing of mortality reinsurance and longevity swaps. The strong reputation of Manulife as a life retrocessionaire in Europe also allowed direct access to senior management in the life reinsurance companies, so I had an ideal vantage point to observe how the different reinsurers operated. Having worked for a couple of life reinsurers, I was interested in the different cultures and strategies that life reinsurers employ.

What was your experience like in Manulife's Germany office?

First, the office in Germany has only 4 employees, so it was a quiet environment. However, despite being a bit thin on the ground, we were supported by very skilled and professional colleagues in Toronto and Boston. Second, as we had a wide area of responsibility, we needed to carefully select the areas where we would concentrate our efforts. This was a great opportunity to develop both time management and organizational skills.

Being overseas, I didn't get to fully appreciate the Manulife working culture; however, I could tell Manulife was an extremely professional organization with a very strong actuarial focus and competency.

Recently, you transferred from Manulife to its US Operations at John Hancock. What influenced your decision to take on this new role?

I had worked in the Germany office for over 4 years, and I was ready for a new challenge. Once I expressed an interest in moving, Manulife was very quick to arrange interviews and support me to move to another division in the company. I explored opportunities within the US (John Hancock), Canada and Asia and ultimately assumed my current role within John Hancock working in the Capital Management department. My main responsibilities surround the use of affiliate reinsurance for John Hancock.

What differences and challenges have you experienced since coming to work in the US?

The move to the US was less of a cultural challenge than the move to Germany six years ago, so I have settled down quickly. I have a lot to learn about the North American actuarial terminology and the product variations that differ from that in Europe. Also, this is the first time I have worked outside of reinsurance, so I am getting used to the culture of working in a large financial services organization.



What has been your greatest professional accomplishment thus far in your career?

My greatest professional accomplishment so far was receiving Manulife's STARS of Excellence Award¹ in 2009 for my work on parametric modeling of mortality improvements in longevity swaps. To achieve this, I had to learn a programming language and implement statistical techniques which would typically be used by scientists in that field.

Being located in a small overseas office, I had assumed that my work would go unnoticed within the wider organization containing so many talented individuals, so I was quite taken aback to be recognized at this level by my North American colleagues.

The STARS of Excellence award ceremony in Toronto was very enjoyable. As the sole Reinsurance Division honoree, I sat at the head table with our President and CEO, Donald Guloien.

Overall, it was a great opportunity to meet members of Manulife's executive team and other honorees in a friendly and relaxed environment.

What career advice do you have for actuaries?

Firstly, not to be daunted by what statistical science is developing and to be confident in the actuary's ability to understand this work and implement it to solve life insurance problems.

Secondly, don't be afraid to voice your criticisms. The financial crisis has demonstrated the importance of critically analyzing decisions impacting risk. Actuaries are key stakeholders in this sense, given their training and focus. A heavy responsibility falls on actuaries to encourage debates and think critically on issues that the wider public is not equipped to understand.

¹ Manulife's STARS of Excellence Recognition Program honors the Company's top achievers under VP level. Nominated individuals are selected by the senior management group within each Division. The criteria developed for this award are based on four STAR qualities: Superior knowledge and skills, Trust and integrity, Action-orientation and Responsiveness. The STARS recognition dinner is hosted by the Board of Directors.